

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 4, 2014

The Honorable Deborah L. James
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary James:

We thank you for the work the Air Force has done over the past decade to address the impacts of major fuel leak at Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB) that has been affecting the base and the region since the 1950s. As you know, estimates of the extent of the spill have ranged from 2 million to 24 million gallons with depths of 500 feet posing a threat to Albuquerque's drinking water supply operated by the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), which has jurisdiction over the cleanup, has required the Air Force to submit its plans for characterization and remediation for review and direction. We remain grateful that the Air Force has accepted responsibility for the threat to the city's water supply and that you have pledged to provide the necessary resources to clean up the fuel.


In the years following the discovery of the leak, the Air Force has relied on available science to address the environmental and health impacts of the spill. Since 2003, the Air Force has been operating a soil vapor extraction system in an attempt to slow the progress of the fuel plume, and has also installed more than 100 monitoring wells. Approximately three years ago, the Air Force contracted with Shaw Environmental (now C-BI) to characterize the spill and report on a regular basis to the NMED. Both the NMED and the communities surrounding KAFB have expressed frustration on the seeming lack of progress in finalizing a plan for a long term solution.

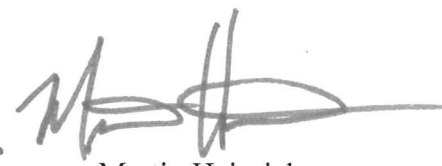
Over the past year, five concurrent studies have looked at the problem including those from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Air Force, the US Geological Survey, the New Mexico Environment Department and the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. They have produced significant variations in their characterization of the extent of the problem and the time it may take to reach the city's water supply. As a result the community is left with uncertainty and doubt as to nature and timing of the final remedy.


In an attempt to bring clarity and direction to all parties, we ask that you immediately consult with the National Research Council of the National Academies of Science to evaluate the studies to date and provide guidance on a way forward. As the operating arm of the National Academies, the National Research Council's independent, expert reports inform government decision making and public policy while increasing the public's understanding. In particular, we ask that you consult with Dr. Jeff Jacobs, Director of the Water Science and Technology Board, to undertake a review of the recent studies and provide a resolution to the discrepancies provided in these studies. Dr. Jacobs is copied on this letter.

We look forward to hearing from you with regards to this study and thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring that decisions on mitigation and remediation are based on the best available science.

Sincerely,


Tom Udall
U.S. Senator


Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senator


Michelle Lujan Grisham
U.S. Representative

Cc: Dr. Jeff Jacobs, Director of the Water Science and Technology Board